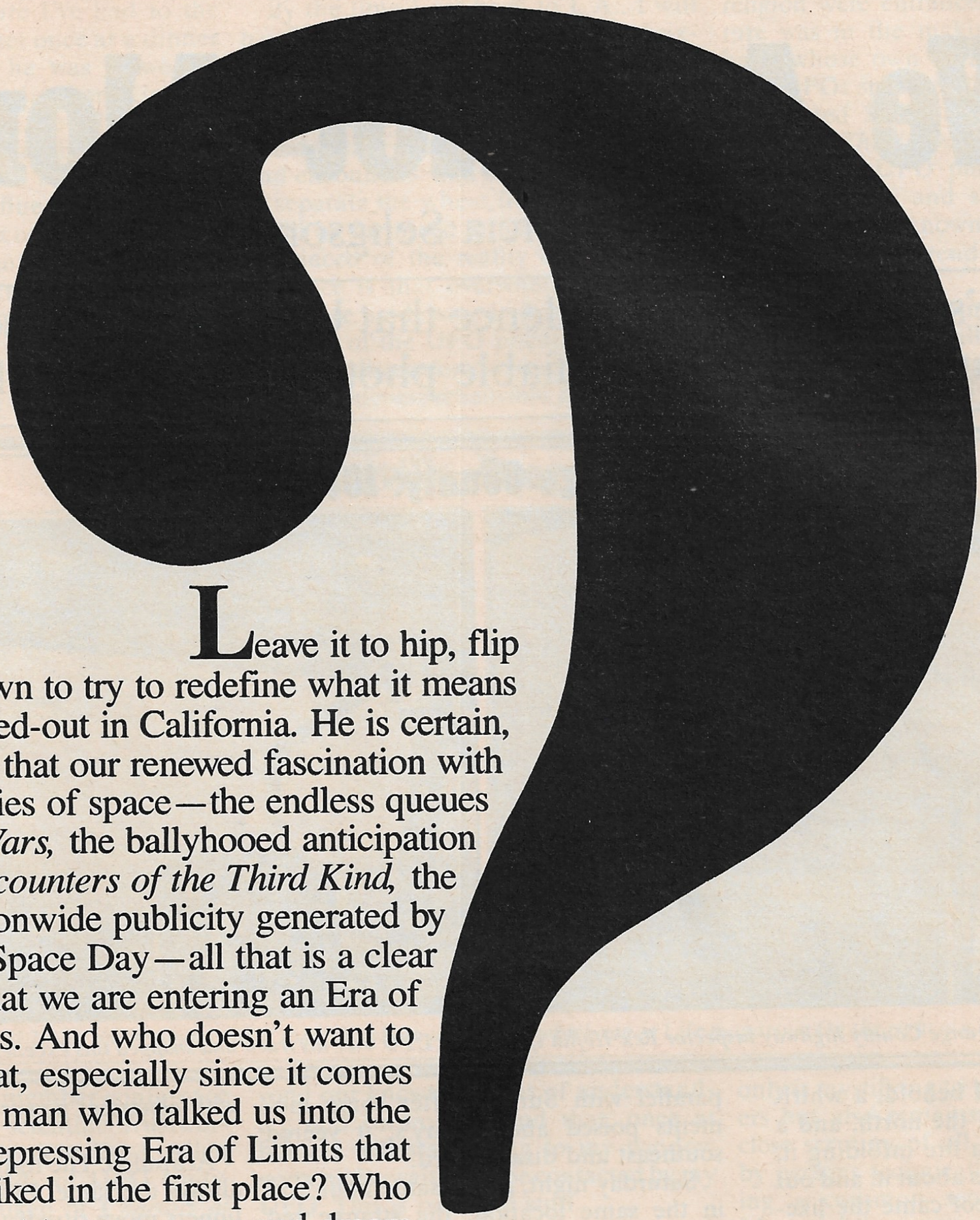
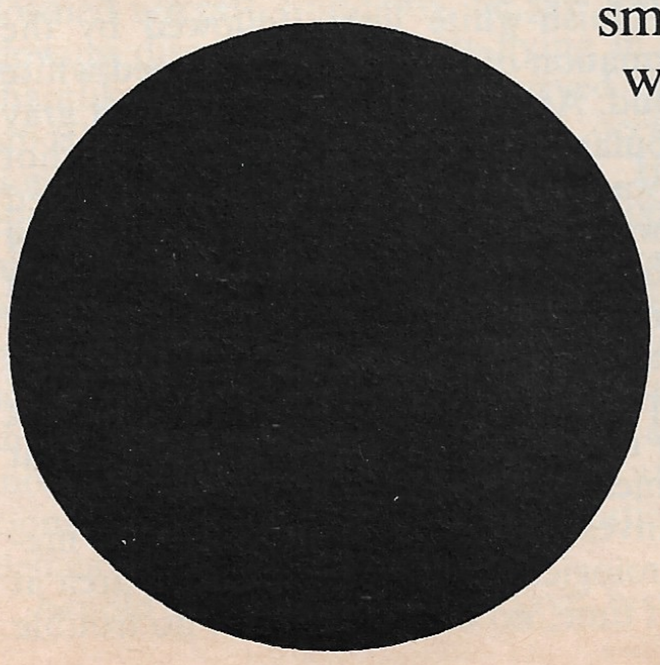
NEW WEST



Leave it to hip, flip Jerry Brown to try to redefine what it means to be spaced-out in California. He is certain, he tells us, that our renewed fascination with the mysteries of space—the endless queues for *Star Wars,* the ballyhooed anticipation over *Close Encounters of the Third Kind,* the nationwide publicity generated by California's Space Day—all that is a clear sign that we are entering an Era of Possibilities. And who doesn't want to believe that, especially since it comes from the man who talked us into the current depressing Era of Limits that none of us liked in the first place? Who doesn't want to space-gaze and dream of interplanetary potentials, rather than sit by the tube and grouse about the earthly limits of human relationships, high unemployment and the price of gasoline? So fasten your space helmet and explore with us the reality of UFOs, the eerie pink clouds above and the small army of westerners who are preparing to live out in space—right now. To paraphrase one of our foremost cosmic thinkers, Woody Allen, the question no longer is: Are there really beings from outer space? The question to ponder is: Do they carry ray guns?

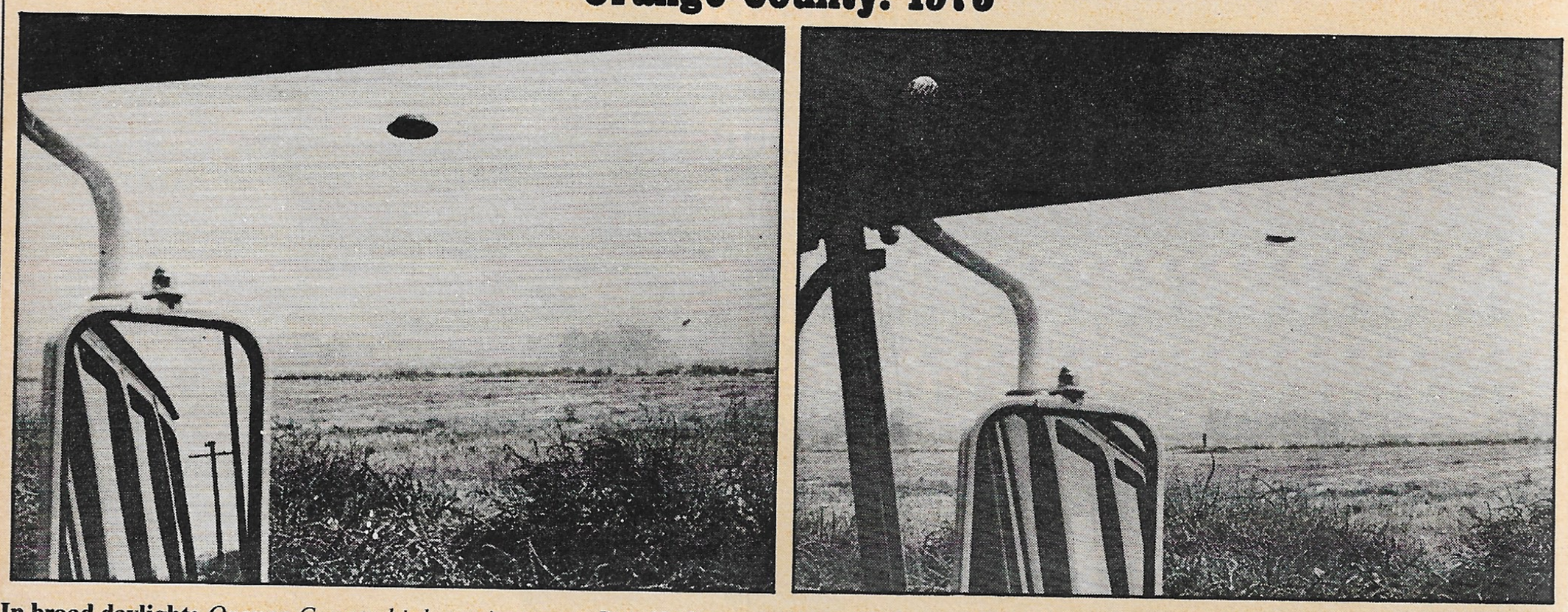


We Are Not Alone

By Marcia Seligson

"... There's overwhelming evidence that UFOs are real—some 70,000 sightings and encounters, verifiable photos and polygraph tests ..."

Orange County: 1975



In broad daylight: *Orange County highway inspector Rex Heflin spotted the UFO over his truck and snapped this excellent daylight sequence.*

And I saw, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, and a great cloud, and a fire infolding it, and brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures and every one had four faces . . . and their feet were straight feet, and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like the color of burnished brass. . . . And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters. . . .

—*Ezekiel,* Chapter 1

On the night of February 5, 1960, in the time between 11:15 and midnight, something was seen hovering over Tiny Naylor's drive-in restaurant, on the northwest corner of Sunset and La Brea in Hollywood. It was not, as cynics might have suggested, a levitating guacamole-burger. Rather, it began as a brilliant red light, traveling due east parallel with Sunset. After some moments poised above Tiny's, it veered southeast and disappeared.

Saturday night, at the same hour and in the same location, the strange red light returned—moving slowly, then stopping dead still for eight minutes, about 500 feet above the ground. Suddenly, hundreds of witnesses in the area heard a fierce explosion and saw a flash of bluish-white light, followed by the formation of a mushroom-shaped white cloud. At the instant of the flash a gray tubular object, about 70 feet long, shot upward, and a smaller object spiralled down toward the earth. The dazzling red light went out, reappeared, moved northeast and seemed to gain altitude steadily. Finally, at about 28,000 feet it stopped, remained motionless for about ten minutes; then it shot straight up at immense speed and vanished.

Investigators established that no meteorological balloons were in the area at that time, no known aircraft, no trouble with electrical power lines.

Acapulco. The tropical weeks here are always the same. In each one the vacationers move ritualistically from pool to sand to shop to bar to disco; after two days they peel and blotch, after three they succumb to the dread "turistas," after seven they fly back home, feeling guiltily disappointed. Into this resort setting, however, have come 1,500 nontourists with a consuming passion and singular mission. They have arrived from all parts of the globe with no intention of acquiring suntans or straw hats. Some of them are highly reputed astronomers, social scientists, aerospace engineers, physicists, clergymen, writers and thinkers; some are folks with advanced degrees in flakeometry; many, perhaps most, have had or believe that they have had a common experience that has substantially altered their lives. All 1,500 are members of a giant subterranean cult, a cult largely dismissed and

scorned by regular society, most particularly by the American government. They are gathered here in steamy Acapulco for the First International Congress of Unidentified Flying Objects.

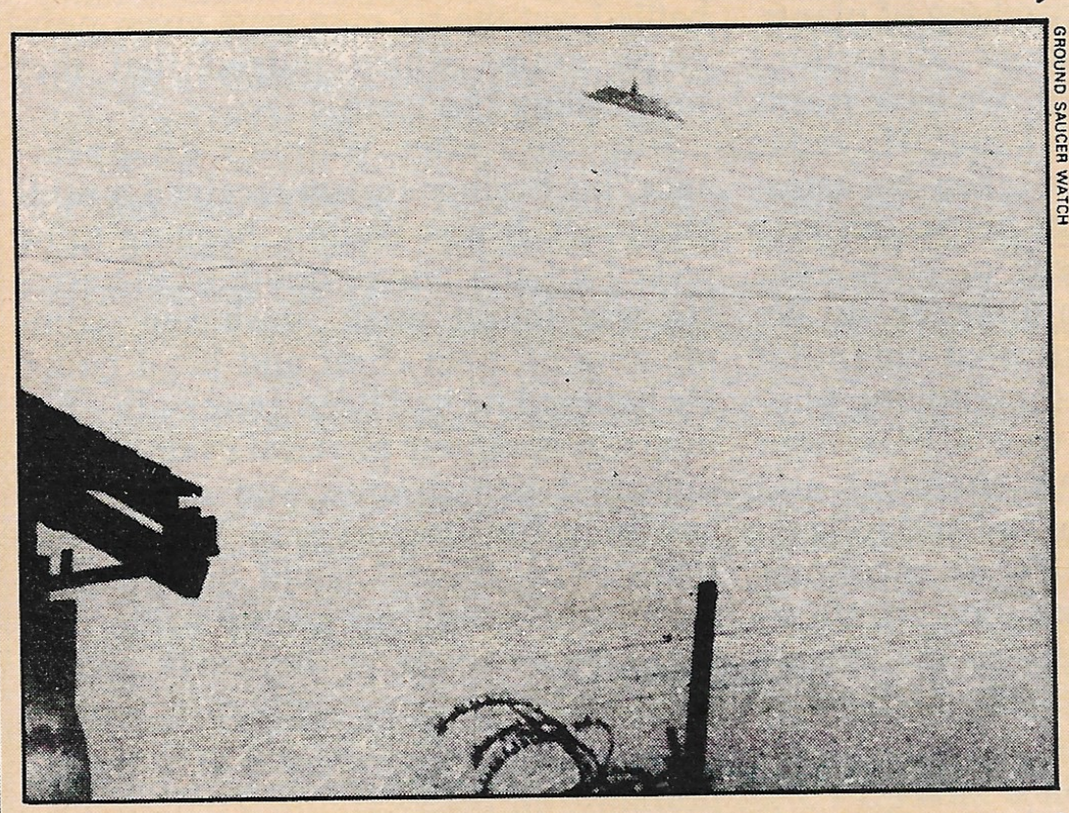
Oddly, I am here with them. Up to now the only exposure I've had to the subject was a guy I met once at a dinner party, who told me he was in weekly contact with some dudes from Uranus, whereupon I beat it to the other side of the patio. But something has drawn me to this conclave, this brotherhood as blindly obsessed, as fluent in its jargon, and as righteous in its convictions as any bunch of skiers, Scientologists or movie producers I've ever known.

I am in Acapulco neither believing nor disbelieving in the existence of UFOs, having no information at all, but interested in taking a beginner's course. the classic "cases," I haven't heard a word yet about the shocking U.S. government conspiracy of silence. And I don't even know who Kenneth Arnold is—the equivalent to asking at Wimbledon, "Who's Bjorn Borg?"

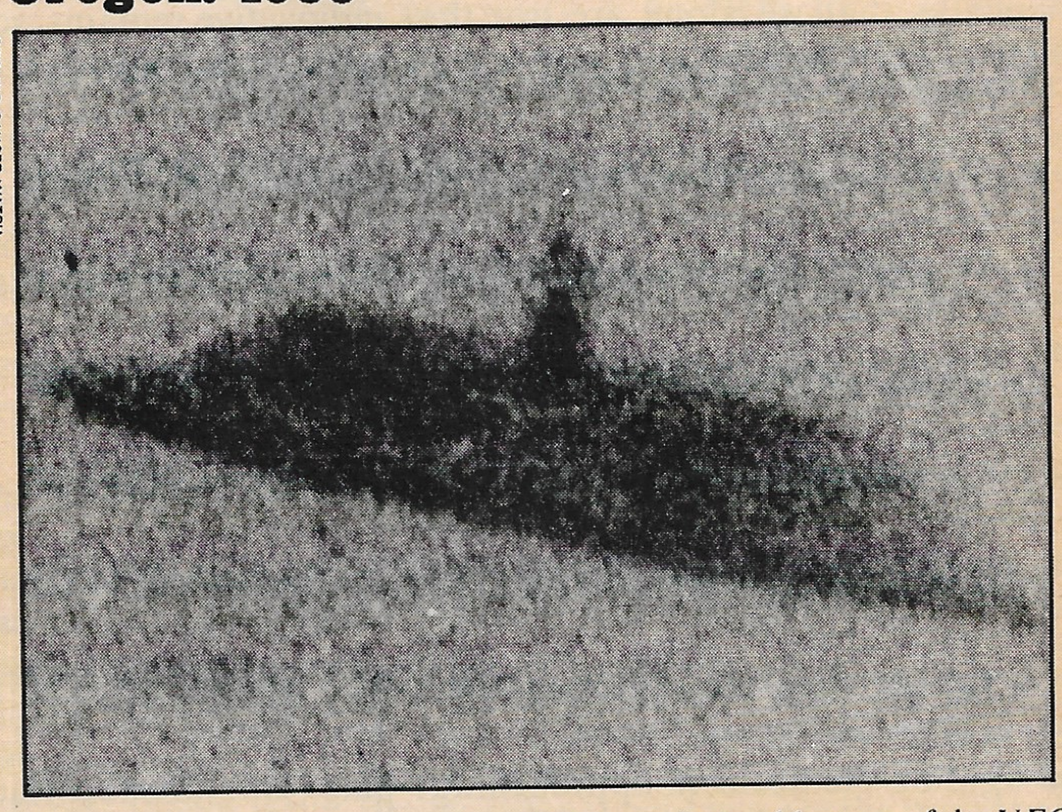
By the time I get back to L.A., I will have sat through a humid week of sixteen-hour days, absorbed a mountain of the newest research and cases, heard an encyclopedia of conflicting theories, listened to tale after tale of UFO sightings and encounters, and struggled earnestly to separate the wheat from the garbage. I will be surprised at how readily I was convinced of the reality of UFOs—the evidence is that overwhelming. And I will have understood, finally, the fascination of the UFO phenomenon—the romance/discomfort/mystery engendered by these incomprehensible *things* so beto a 30-year investigation. The first official Air Force probe into UFOs was prompted by the hundreds of sightings revealed after Arnold's; organizations of aroused citizens sprung up; persons always on the lookout for a hot new religion were entranced; a true subculture was in the making. Steven Spielberg, whose own lifelong enthrallment with UFOs spawned Columbia's keenly anticipated $19-million *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (see page 24), says flatly: "The UFO phenomenon is the most seductive and significant adventure into the unknown of our lifetime." All UFO mavens tend to talk in quotable extremes.

"Unidentified Flying Object" should be defined. To officially be designated a UFO, an object or light must be one, writes Dr. J. Allen Hynek, "which not

McMinnville, Oregon: 1950



GROUND SAUCER WATCH



Back on the farm: *Paul Trent, an Oregon farmer, took the photo on the left, which ran in* Life *magazine. On the right is a blow-up of the UFO.*

I'm glad that the 27-member conference panel will include scientific trustworthies such as astrophysicist Dr. J. Allen Hynek, the Big Daddy of UFO study, and Erich Von Daniken of *Chariots of the Gods* celebrity. And I'm curious about the stated goal of the assembly: to draft a resolution to the U.N., urging it to set up an international panel to research UFOs.

Beyond that, I have only two banal opinions: First, it seems obvious that in this immense cosmos, we're probably not the only, or even the most intelligent, life casting about, although it certainly fits American egocentricity to think so. But, second, part of me believes that if there really *were* extraterrestrial objects and alien entities around, Barbara Walters would have gotten to them by now. I know that more than 100 books on UFOs are currently in print—my favorite title among them being *God Drives a Flying Saucer.* However, I have read none of them, I haven't studied any of yond our known systems of understanding and control. Beyond that, once at home I will start going to my window every night, waiting to be contacted by my UFO. This is powerful stuff. . . .

On June 24, 1947, a Boise salesman named Kenneth Arnold was flying his private plane over Mount Rainier, Washington, helping in the search for a downed aircraft. Suddenly, he saw nine glowing disc-shaped objects flying in a chainlike formation. They swerved erratically between several peaks, occasionally flipping over in unison. He clocked their speed; it exceeded 1,000 miles per hour. When the press picked up his astounding story, one journalist referred to the objects of Arnold's description as "flying saucers," and thus the colloquial term was born. (It is almost never used, incidentally, by aficionados, who feel the popularization demeans the subject.)

Arnold's experience also gave birth only is mystifying to the original observers but also remains unidentified after close scrutiny of all available evidence by persons technically capable of making a common sense identification." Most sightings are not UFOs, naturally—that is, they yield to eventual identification. In Acapulco, William Spaulding, an aerospace engineer and head of a Phoenix group called Ground Saucer Watch, tells me there are several things an alleged UFO can be: among them, a secret weapon of ours or somebody else's; a strange new natural phenomenon, such as plasma charges or ball lightning; a perfectly identifiable object, such as a satellite or firefly or weather balloon or cloud formation, which is thought mistakenly to be a UFO; a hallucination; a hoax, as evidenced by photos allegedly of UFOs, which turn out to be Frisbees on strings, or of an "alien being," which turns out to be a monkey from the pet store shaved and painted green. Then there are the 20 percent or so of all

"... UFOs tend to arrive after dark in unpopulated areas, can hang suspended or speed away, stall cars, stop clocks and scorch the earth ..."

reported encounters which simply cannot be explained by any known cause. These are UFOs.

The evidence of their existence is found in the form of verifiable photographs, 60,000 to 70,000 sightings and encounters reported from all over the globe (those having gone unreported are incalculable), polygraph tests given to witnesses, and physical traces found in the region where an object has landed. By now, there have been too many patterns of similarity—remote islanders telling the same stories as Pan Am pilots—to write the whole thing off as mass delusion. Something real is going on out there, the exact nature of which defies us, eludes and mesmerizes us, but has to convince us that we alone are not the masters of the universe.

The meat of UFOlogy is the "case." Cases are the folklore, the Grand Guignol, the bedtime ghost stories that captivate and haunt UFO freaks and provide the heart of serious research. In Acapulco, in the spring, I hear hundreds of them; put two buffs together and they will be thrilled just to rehash, while the sun rises and sets, all the minutiae of the basic tales, knowing by heart every teensy microscopic gossipy detail. One such case that comes up regularly and is considered bona fide is that of Air Force Captain Larry Coyne, who, on the night of October 18, 1974, was flying a helicopter in Ohio with three crew members. A red light on the horizon, approaching the chopper at great speed on a collision course, forced Coyne to put the chopper into a steep dive. When the UFO was within 500 feet, the crew saw it as metallic gray, cigar-shaped, a dome on top and the red light in front. The chopper was at 1,500 feet elevation, and as the two were about to collide the UFO suddenly changed speed and direction, hovered close to the helicopter, beaming a dazzling green light into the cockpit, then turned and sped away. Coyne noticed his controls were still set for the dive, but his elevation was now 3,800 feet. The helicopter had soared 2,300 feet without the controls being altered and with no sensation of lifting.

UFOs have been seen by a cross-section of the population—more by pilots and astronomers than people of other professions—but equally by true believers, smirking cynics and citizens with no prior opinion. From this massive bank of eyewitness accounts emerges whatever small understanding we now have. We know, for instance, that UFOs tend to be either discoid, spherical or cigar-shaped, that they are capable of hanging suspended, appearing and becoming invisible at will and moving at enormous speeds. The immense energy that they emit can cause car engines to stall, auto electrical systems to fail, clocks to stop, grass to burn up. They tend to arrive after dark, in unpopulated areas, and in "flaps," or waves that occur every five years and bear no predictability or relation to any other solar activities.

In the "science" of UFOlogy, there are three categories of cases. A "close encounter of the first kind" (CE I for short) means the sighting of a UFO. A CE II refers to measurable changes in the surrounding environment, such as radioactive remains, scorching of plants, geological transformations, distortions of the gravitational field. We have reams of data regarding CE I and II: radar trackings, photographs taken by astronauts, film from rocket-borne cameras and sightings by dozens or even hundreds of witnesses simultaneously. We have extremely sophisticated computer evaluation techniques for studying photos and determining true UFOs from jokes or mistakes, plus chemical and metallurgical testing for soil and foliage.

The final category, a "close encounter of the third kind," means direct confrontation with alien beings, and it is clearly the category most difficult to believe, impossible to verify, fearsome and gripping. Our documentation comes solely from witnesses, from their polygraph tests and regressional hypnosis, and from residues of radioactivity on their bodies. Reports of CE IIIs are less frequent than the others, but, of course, we are more likely to phone the police about a strange light beam in the skies than about little green men frolicking in the Jacuzzi. Nonetheless, the mass of data on CE III episodes is as uniform as the other categories: The alien beings—"humanoids" as they're known—are characterized as about four feet tall, gray or tan, hairless and without nails, pumpkin-shaped heads, and foul-smelling.

One thing is evident: The effect of a close encounter is always profound. UFOs or their occupants can exert inestimable influence on the percipient, to manipulate consciousness, cause temporary paralysis, loss of memory, increased psychic abilities and healings. It is in this area that the study of UFOs crosses over into the mystical or parapsychological.

The most significant abduction case, with witnesses, occurred in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in Arizona in November of 1975. As seven foresters were returning home after work in a pickup truck, they spotted a windowless disc, about ten feet high and fifteen feet in diameter, hovering over a clearing in the woods. Travis Walton leaped from the truck and ran toward the UFO, despite his friends' frightened efforts to call him back. When he was underneath the disc, an intense ray of blue light shot down at him, either causing him to vanish or knocking him unconscious. (The six witnesses disagree on this point, and Walton doesn't remember.)

Terrified, the men drove to safety, and when they regained their composure and returned to the clearing the UFO and Walton were gone. The police were baffled, yet the six men were given polygraph exams which judged that they were telling the truth.

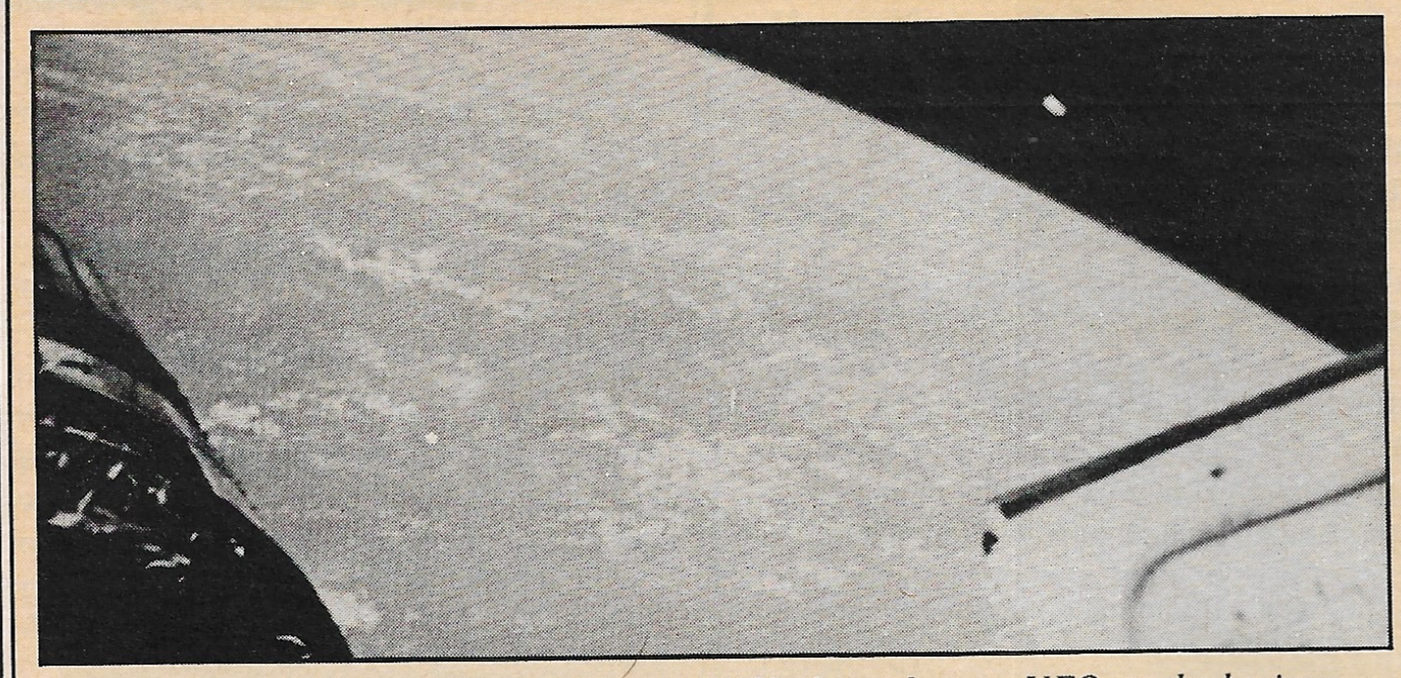
Five days after Walton's disappearance, his brother-in-law received a midnight call. It was Walton, begging to be picked up at a phone booth in the area. He was found weak, unshaven, complaining of great chest and head pains. He believed he had been gone only a few hours. A complete physical examination indicated dehydration and simple exhaustion, but doctors said Walton was well nourished and could not possibly have been wandering in the wilderness for those five days. A tiny mark resembling an intravenous puncture was on the inside of Walton's right arm.

Walton remembered only the following details: He had awakened on a white examination table with terrible pains in his head and chest. Standing over him were three five-foot-tall hairless creatures (one female), with huge eyes, colorless faces and no fingernails. They did not speak, but examined his body thoroughly. At one point, when left alone, Walton ran to another room and started pressing buttons on the arm of a chair; one button opened an overhead panel through which he could see stars. Moments later one of the creatures led Walton to a big lighted space where several smaller craft were lined up. Some other creatures, with hair, placed a mask over his face, and Walton recalled nothing else until he awoke lying in the middle of a highway in Arizona.

A large amount of residual magnetism was found in the clearing after the incident and all six witnesses had body rashes and a loss of sensory acuteness. Walton was interviewed under hypnosis, and the experts concluded that he had in fact been taken aboard an alien craft.

Indeed, the UFO drama is so intricate

The CIA's Cosmic Cover-up Conspiracy



Space for conjecture: *This 1966 Gemini XII photo shows a UFO on the horizon.*

A Gallup poll of 1974 revealed that 54 percent of the American public think that UFOs are real; in fact, 11 percent claim to have had personal UFO sightings. Governments throughout the world are openly investigating the phenomenon. And yet in America the issue has always been shrouded in disdain, censorship and ridicule, largely perpetrated by our own government, though at the same time, the military apparently has been covertly amassing data on UFOs for the past 30 years.

After Kenneth Arnold's sighting in 1947—itself only one in a massive "flap" of that year—the Air Force initiated a study known as Project Blue Book, which systematically explained away at least 60 sightings a month. A typical example was the 1966 occurrence in Dexter, Michigan, in which a man saw a large object with pulsating lights hovering behind his house. A patrolman was called, saw the object and three more like it, and summoned help. In all, 57 persons in the area clearly saw the UFOs. The Air Force's verdict: "swamp gas."

The Air Force's attitude seemed to reflect policy set in the mid-fifties after the CIA took control of the project and established the Robertson Panel of scientists and CIA "representatives." Their conclusions:Civilian organizations reporting UFOs should be kept under surveillance and national security agencies should do all they can to debunk UFOs. In short order, the Air Force created a regulation declaring that "the percentage of unidentifieds must be reduced to a minimum" and another regulation threatening any member of the military who released information on UFOs with a ten-year prison term and a fine of $10,000.

Then when pressure rose on the government to delve into the mystery, after the summer of 1965 produced the largest flying saucer wave in American history, an independent panel was established. It was headed by physicist Edward Condon, who was on record as saying the study would be a waste of time; the Condon committee concluded that UFOs did not exist. This despite the fact that it could not explain one third of the 117 cases it researched. Dr. J. Allen Hynek, who resigned in protest as an Air Force consultant to Project Blue Book, has labelled this whole affair "the Cosmic Watergate." One can only speculate, "Why the cover-up?"

–M.S.

and complex, so beyond the limits of our current comprehension, that even the most dedicated detectives don't really know whether it is a subject to be filed under astronomy, physics, chemistry, psychology, religion or metaphysics. Or all of those. But after 30 years of UFO research conducted by the 5 million hobbyist buffs, the scores of scientists working mostly in secret, the 100 UFO organizations in America alone, there is an accumulation of material weighty enough to bury the toughest skeptic. Therefore, at the conference in Acapulco, the question is *never* raised, "Do UFOs exist?" That they do is a given. The sole issues here are the ones that have burned since Kenneth Arnold's adventure inspired this whole movement: What are they? Why are they here? What can we do about them?

Twenty-seven panelists from eleven countries have arrived for this week's conference. In the general scheme, each expert will have an hour to present his spiffiest new cases, his visual materials, his own pet theories, and then answer questions. In between, there are intermittent press conferences, films, dreary dinners and the usual stiff parties. The food is awful, the simultaneous translations are hilarious, the organization is Latin chaos, the prescribed agenda is never fulfilled and in those ways it resembles your standard shoe manufacturers' convention. That it is the only conference I've ever attended where the unstated subpurpose *isn't* Getting Laid is a commentary either on this unique bunch of soldiers with their own special passion, or on the palpable dissension that clutches the mammoth hall even before the proceedings have begun. Another journalist, long a UFO fanatic himself, explains to me that the strains and snarlings are in the nature of UFOlogy itself, a field containing more bitchery, warring factions and I'm-okay-you're-full-of-shit than an assembly of California shrinks.

At one extreme are what's known as the "nuts-and-bolts" guys. The no-nonsense scientists, aerospace engineers, mathematicians. UFOs, they contend, are solely a problem for science and technology, are extraterrestrial in origin, with a current purpose of surveillance of our planet and examination of our bodies. The more mystical and paranormal elements are anathema to these "hardware" UFOlogists, who are most easily identified by their vociferous hatred of the other guys.

The other guys are either friends of, or in-the-flesh, "contactees." Contactees claim not only to have had a close encounter with space visitors, but also to have established long-term relationships with them, which include an occasional lunch on Venus. Organized groups of contactees in California meet once a week to receive essentially similar telepathic dispatches: "We are here to save your planet, and you are the messenger." The classic religious components—appearance of a "savior," secret revelations, a mission and miraculous happenings—lie at the root of contacteeism.

The "hardware" guys and the contactees are at war in Acapulco. And I don't know what to make of either, pure science seeming more and more limited as my knowledge expands bit by bit, and the contactees always appearing to me like total fruitcakes.

The conference, held in Acapulco's giant and impressive new convention center, is a Yalta of noncommunication; no two experts actually agree on anything and nobody has room for anybody else's position. Major Hans Petersen, the inspector of airports in the Royal Danish Air Force, tells the assemblage he has seen 30 UFOs and they have gotten in touch with him after his radio speeches. His favorite case is of Cedric Allingham, an amateur Scottish ornithologist who had a saucer land in front of him in 1956. A figure emerged and said—well, not exactly "said," you understand—that

". . . An expert says: 'The only thing left for UFOs to do is make overt contact with us' . . ."

he was from Mars. A fisherman was hiding in the trees and watched the whole incident; Cedric took pictures, but three months later Cedric vanished forever. This is just the kind of contactee story that makes the "hardware" people puke.

Erich Von Daniken primarily engages our attention with the monumental sales figures of his books. His *Chariots of the Gods* theories are two-fold: (1) this planet was inhabited by alien beings in antiquity, and (2) man is the intelligent product of artificial mutations created by beings from outer space. The more generous authorities credit Von Daniken with spreading UFOs into mass culture, but they think his notions are junk. He leaves the conference after the second day.

Throughout the week aerospace engineer Bill Spaulding walks off the dais whenever a contactee proponent is speaking. Spaulding, who looks like an astronaut, has brought with him two items of extreme interest: 31 photos which, out of the 600 that his computer has analyzed, measure up as genuine flying saucers, and a six-page report claiming that the CIA has been covertly investigating UFOs while claiming indifference (see page *23*). Spaulding says UFOs originate in another galaxy, but have bases on Mars and Jupiter—not coincidentally, he points out, the only planets our space program has chosen to explore. His own bias will not let him accept the undocumentable evidence of most CE IIIs, but he adds, with solemn pauses: "The only thing left for UFOs to do is make overt contact. This is the computer projection."

Jim Hurtak is director of the Academy for Future Science, wears a beret all the time and embraces the view that UFOs come from another whole universe or whole series of universes which are interlocked with ours either in space or time. I have no idea what that means. Hurtak thinks the majority of UFO bases are located at higher evolutionary energy platforms beneath our oceans and that Navy radar has tracked underwater vehicle movement at 250 knots down to 20,000 feet. A renowned Spanish UFOlogist named Antonio Ribera, on the other hand, believes UFOs originate in the hidden cities on Mars. And then there is the Hungarian, Colman Von Keviczky, current director of the Intercontinental Galactic Spacecraft, UFO Research and Analytic Network. The only panelist who does not perceive the UFO and its inhabitants as benign, Von Keviczky is terrified of an intergalactic space war, resurrects Douglas MacArthur who once said something to that effect, and sounds quite like a Buck Rogers comic strip.

Dr. J. Allen Hynek shows promise of being the voice of sobriety in this bacchanal of the imagination. He was chairman of the Northwestern University Department of Astronomy, employed by the Air Force as a consultant to their Project Blue Book investigation, author of the major texts on UFOs, Spielberg's consultant on *Close Encounters*. . . . From him, I think, we at Acapulco will surely get sanity and *definitive* answers on what the hell this thing is all about. So, naturally, he begins his talk by saying, "An expert has studied UFOs long enough to realize he is utterly ignorant. The UFO is the outstanding strange dilemma of our age. We don't know *what* they are."

And so it goes, the factions becoming more sundered and more fiercely locked into place each day. One morning I try to set up a luncheon dialogue with three authorities who seem of like mind. One, when invited, snaps brutishly: "I wouldn't appear on toilet paper with them." Everybody's statistics are different, everyone's pictures are more accurate than the last guy's. The "experts," I surmise, aren't here to learn anything.

We tend, in matters of polarized viewpoints, to choose one as a favorite. In this game anybody's horse is probably as good as anybody else's horse, so one just bets on the most interesting to watch. From the first day of the conference, my money is on Jacques Vallee. For one thing, he looks like a French movie star; for another, he opens his address with the kind of statement journalists adore: "It may be," he says, "that UFOs are not unidentified, not flying and not objects.

"Do not jump from the notion that UFOs are nonsense to the notion that they are visitations from outer space. *That* doesn't explain the facts at all. I like to look at the phenomenon as what it does, never mind where it's from and who they are because that may possibly be beyond what science can find out. It may not be a scientific problem at all."

Dr. Vallee holds the most provocative and far-encompassing notions of any expert in UFOlogy. An astrophysicist, computer scientist, colleague of Dr. Hynek, and author of five books on UFOs, Vallee admits he would lose interest if it turned out UFOs were *merely* extraterrestrial.

Steven Spielberg:

The camera dollies in on Candice Bergen, smashing in burgundy clingy velvet. She opens the envelope. "And now, the Oscar for The Most Prolonged Pregnancy, Most Arduous Labor and Most Hair-raising Delivery of a Motion Picture—to Steven Spielberg, writer and director of Close Encounters of the Third Kind. *An intense, small-framed young man in glasses and a baseball cap lopes to the stage; the industry audience rises to its feet and cheers wildly. This is surely the most well-deserved Academy Award of the year 1977.*

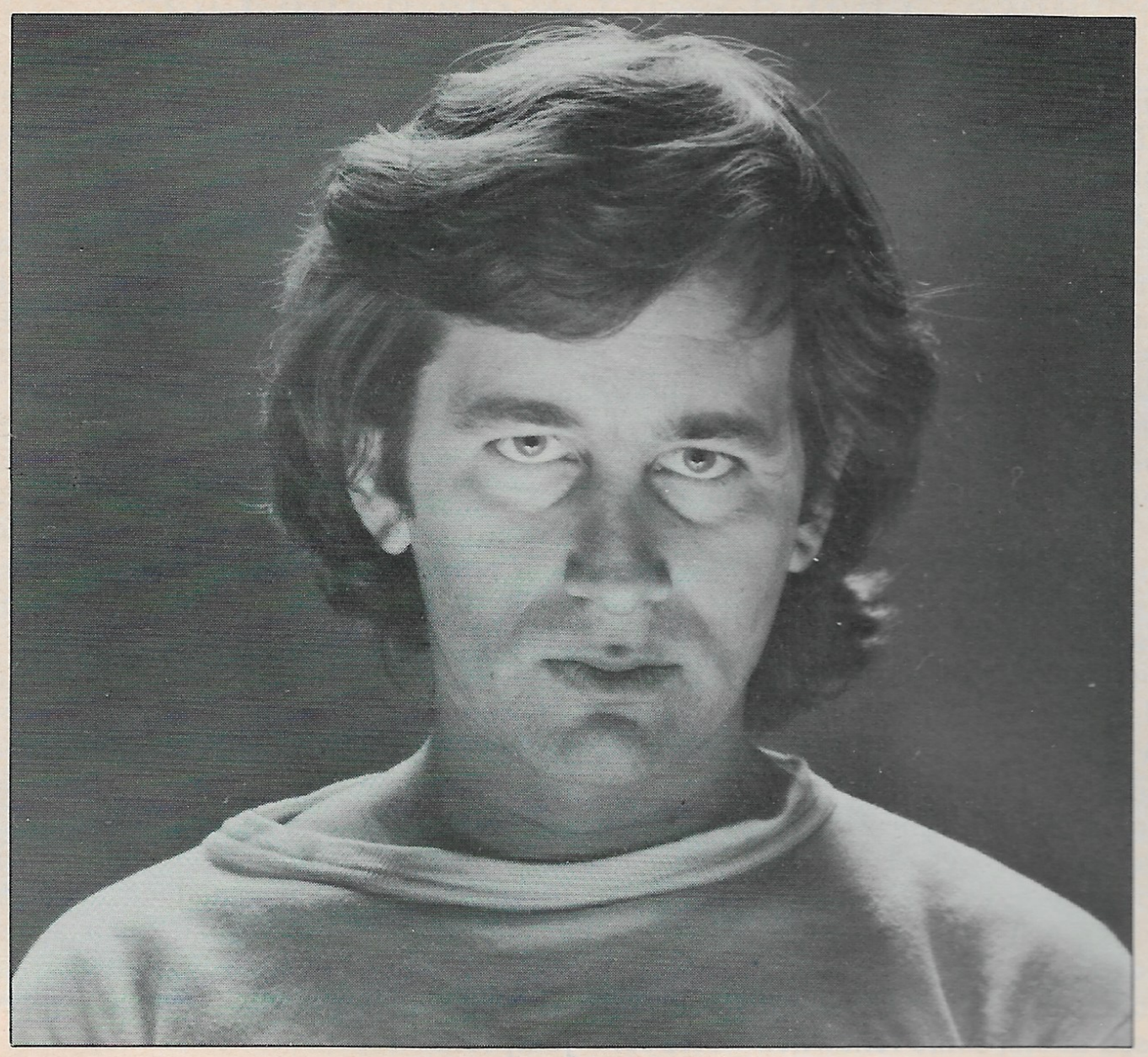
It is now one month before *Close Encounters* is scheduled to open, and Spielberg is still shooting. Not anything major, of course, that was all finished one year ago—and since then he and his consortium have been working sixteen-hour days on editing, dubbing and creating several million dollars worth of special effects. What he's filming at this frighteningly late date are tiny scenes, the fruits of sleepless nights when new ideas suddenly burst into his head. Scenes that will comprise perhaps 45 seconds in the finished movie, or may even be abandoned to the cutting room floor.

He's not shooting now because he has been lazy in the past, or unprofessional, or because what he's already got stinks. This film *is* his child, and he is terrified to let go, to spring it into the world, to have it judged and found wanting. He wants it to be perfect. So he cannot stop noodling.

I've never been with a presidential candidate on the eve of election. But I have been with Steven Spielberg several times in recent weeks, and he is not a man to be envied at this moment. His nails are bitten beyond their limits, his sentences tend to be chaotic fragments, and in other circumstances he would probably be a candidate for double doses of Thorazine. Small wonder. At 29, he is the youngest of Hollywood's hot directors; his last movie is still the biggest grosser of all time—one out of five Americans saw *Jaws*—and the universe is awaiting this one as if it were Beethoven's Tenth.

Spielberg himself is an engaging concoction of boy/man: He reminds you of your brilliant, funny, hyperkinetic kid cousin who seems to know everything in the world by the age of ten. At the same time he brings to mind your uncle—the iron-willed

rg: The Man Behind Columbia Pictures' $19-Million Gamble



Wishing on a star: *Director Spielberg is hoping* Close Encounters *will top his* Jaws.

cagey businessman-entrepreneur who quietly exerts unquestioned control over everybody. Steven is a bona fide workaholic, already thoroughly immersed in his next two projects while still sweating out this one. "But I'm really lazy," he insists, "and I procrastinate until the pressure is unbelievable. Always, always." A toy and gadget freak, he owns a massive desk with built-in paper shredder, cassette recorder, color TV, memory phone, adding machine, clock and stereo AM-FM radio ("it also takes itself to the bathroom twice a day"). Computer games, video games, pool tables and pinball machines find a home wherever he sets up office. He lives in a mini-San Simeon with actress Amy Irving. And his life, it goes without saying, is movies.

In grammer school in New Jersey, Steven made his first film, a three-and-a-half minute stagecoach heist, shot with an 8-mm Kodak. At sixteen, while living in Phoenix, he wrote, photographed, directed and edited a two-and-a-half-hour movie, *Firelight*. The subject: an invasion from space, monsters against the National Guard.

At the age of 21, he was signed to a seven-year director's contract by Universal—based on an impressive short film called *Amblin'* he made while a student at Cal State Long Beach. After several years of making TV features, episodes of *Marcus Welby* and *Duel*, an *ABC–TV Movie of the Week* which has won prizes throughout Europe, he directed his first feature film, *Sugarland Express*. The film was lauded by Pauline Kael as "one of the most phenomenal directorial debut films in the history of movies." Then he directed *Jaws*.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind has been brewing inside him since childhood. "Growing up thinking about UFOs was like growing up with Presley and the Beatles and Howdy Doody," he recalls. One of his most poignant memories is missing his Boy Scout troop outing when, at midnight in the Arizona desert, they all saw a UFO, "a blood-red orb rising up behind some sagebrush, shooting off into space. I felt so left out not being there." Then while on location in Alabama for *Close Encounters* he thought he saw his first UFO, and it was one of the thrilling instants of his life. "When I found out later that it was only an Echo satellite I was as depressed as I've ever been."

The movie has been buried in a secrecy that borders on the ludicrous. The set in Mobile was under 24-hour-a-day security—once when Spielberg forgot his badge the guards wouldn't let him in. Until a few weeks ago, even Columbia's top execs had seen nothing but a first cut, and that was screened over a year ago. The cast and crew have been forbidden to reveal a word about its contents; all that the epic's creator will say is, "I am consciously doing everything in my power to try to make *Close Encounters* a reasonable entertainment about man's first formal contact with extraterrestrial life in our skies. It is not sci-fi, it's an adventure thriller. I don't want to give messages to the world, visitors from outer space who have the cure for cancer or can grow colossal 27-inch tomatoes."

He says he loathes "pretentious, profound moviemaking. Or ambiguous films where one comes out saying, 'Well, I don't know what that picture was about, wasn't it wonderful.' Or bullshit and easy answers. Even your most intelligent people go to the movies to escape, not to ingest information that they have to put together in their heads. I know that's true of me. If I were an audience and not part of the craft, I probably would never see Bergman movies or Zeffirelli or Fellini or Costa-Gavras. I'd probably just see Irwin Allen disaster movies and Lucas films."

George Lucas, of course, is the maker of *Star Wars*, and one of Steven's best friends—they have given each other mutual support, plus pieces of their respective profits. At the same time, the specter of *Star Wars* and its mammoth triumph haunts Spielberg. "My biggest fear," he confesses nervously, "is that because *Close Encounters* is fringed with the label of sci-fi, audiences will be expecting *Star Wars*, in terms of visual battle action and special effects. And then they will be disappointed, sorely shaken in fact. Mine is a film that's rooted on earth, not in stellar space. It's about extraordinary encounters in middle-class suburbia. It's not a movie that keeps attacking the senses with visual assaults."

I told Steven that I had had a fantasy about him. On November 18, the day of the Los Angeles première, my fantasy went, he is found sitting on the living room floor of his Beverly Hills mansion, surrounded by a mountain of film cans. He is holding an M-1 rifle, pointed at the front door. When the armored car and the dozen guards come to pick up the movie, he starts firing. **—M.S.**

Photographed by Matthew Rolston

"... Dr. Vallee says: 'Don't jump from the idea UFOs are from space to the notion they are nonsense. That doesn't explain the facts' ..."

Why, I ask, doesn't outer space hold the answer? He says, "The idea that these are creatures that come from another planet the same way we are going to the moon and Mars doesn't work. First, there is no time origin for the UFO matter; it seems that it has always been with us. In every culture throughout history there are stories, legends, folklore, myths about contact between men and alien creatures. The elves went flying at night in cloud ships; they were humanoid, spoke our language, were luminous; when you danced with an elf for two hours you came back to your village and didn't recognize anybody. These are the same stories as UFOs. In antiquity, they were visualized as 'gods' ; in our own time, as interplanetary travelers, because that's what is appropriate for now. So it may be that we are dealing with 'something' that is projecting images that trigger some of the deepest symbols we have.

"Also, UFOs are capable of doing things that do not exist in our technology. They can dematerialize, or two can simply merge into one. They can project a beam of light that will just stop dead after some feet. They violate the laws of motion as we know them, making our concepts of space and time *wrong*—which is all right, except if they violate those principles, they could be from anywhere, any time. And, mainly, they can exercise a physical and psychic control over objects and humans. We have nothing like that in our technology or physics. All we really know about flying saucers is that they are a tremendous amount of energy stored in a very small volume—the energy of a nuclear power plant, say, contained within something ten feet in diameter."

From the podium on the third day of the conference, Vallee reports a case that rivets everyone. On November 1, 1968, a physician holding an important position in France was awakened at 4 A.M. by the cries of his baby. The child was gesturing excitedly toward the window. The man saw flashes of light which he took to be lightning, but then he observed two disc-shaped objects with horizontal and vertical antennae, emitting beams of white light. As the discs flew closer to the house, their antennae came into contact, the light beams interpenetrated, *and the two craft merged into one.* The single disc then flipped from a horizontal to a vertical position and came nearer, its shaft of light shining directly into the doctor's face. Suddenly there was an explosion, and the disc vanished.

The doctor had hurt his leg three days earlier chopping wood, and it was still bruised and painful. After the incident he realized that the swelling had completely disappeared, and the pain was gone. In the following days, the remains of an Algerian war wound on his right side also disappeared.

Six days later the doctor was tired, distressed and had lost weight. Also, a triangular red marking inexplicably appeared around his navel. Sometime later the same precise marking colored his child's stomach. After two years, Vallee tells us, there was no recurrence of the man's old wounds, but the odd triangles would periodically appear on both the father and son simultaneously.

Vallee became engrossed in UFOlogy while working at the Paris Observatory, when to his shock he noticed that many other astronomers were observing bizarre occurrences in the sky but ignoring or destroying the data. In 1963 he began an underground society of scientists who would study the UFO only behind closed doors; some renowned world scientists belong to this "invisible college." Vallee himself in recent years has gravitated toward the metaphysical, conceiving UFOs as primarily psychic devices, secondarily as actual craft: "We are faced with a *technology* that transcends the physical and is capable of manipulating our reality . . . The purpose of that technology may be to change our concepts of the universe."

By the end of the conference all questions on the agenda have been addressed, but not answered, and nothing has been done about a resolution to the U.N. But I leave with my consciousness altered and a dinner-party repertoire of "close encounters."

One afternoon, a few weeks later, I arranged a lunch between Jacques Vallee and Steven Spielberg. Much to my surprise they have never before met, although a main character in *Close Encounters,* played by François Truffaut, is patterned on Vallee. The "lunch" continues until 6:30. Spielberg stands up 25 actors who are waiting in his office to audition, Vallee misses plane after plane back to his San Francisco home. For me it is like being back at camp, sitting around the fire, telling great spooky ghost stories. . . .

And then there's the one—recounted by Vallee—about Hopkinsville, Kentucky, 1955, a family of seven in a farmhouse. They saw something like a meteor fall in the woods, and for the next three hours they were besieged by small creatures with oversized heads and glowing eyes who were floating, defying gravity. Although the beings were playful, the family was terrified and shot at them. But the creatures were impervious to bullets; the only effect of being "shot" was that their "clothing" sent out a glow after each bullet hit.

"It's like an aerial circus, isn't it?" says Spielberg. "It wouldn't surprise me at all if what I saw over my head last week that looked just like a Chevron gas station sign was in fact another intelligence trying to test our human reaction to the absurd."

"Maybe they're just trying to get our attention," Vallee leaps in. "Maybe somebody *on earth* has their advanced technology now, or maybe somebody in the past could travel back and forth."

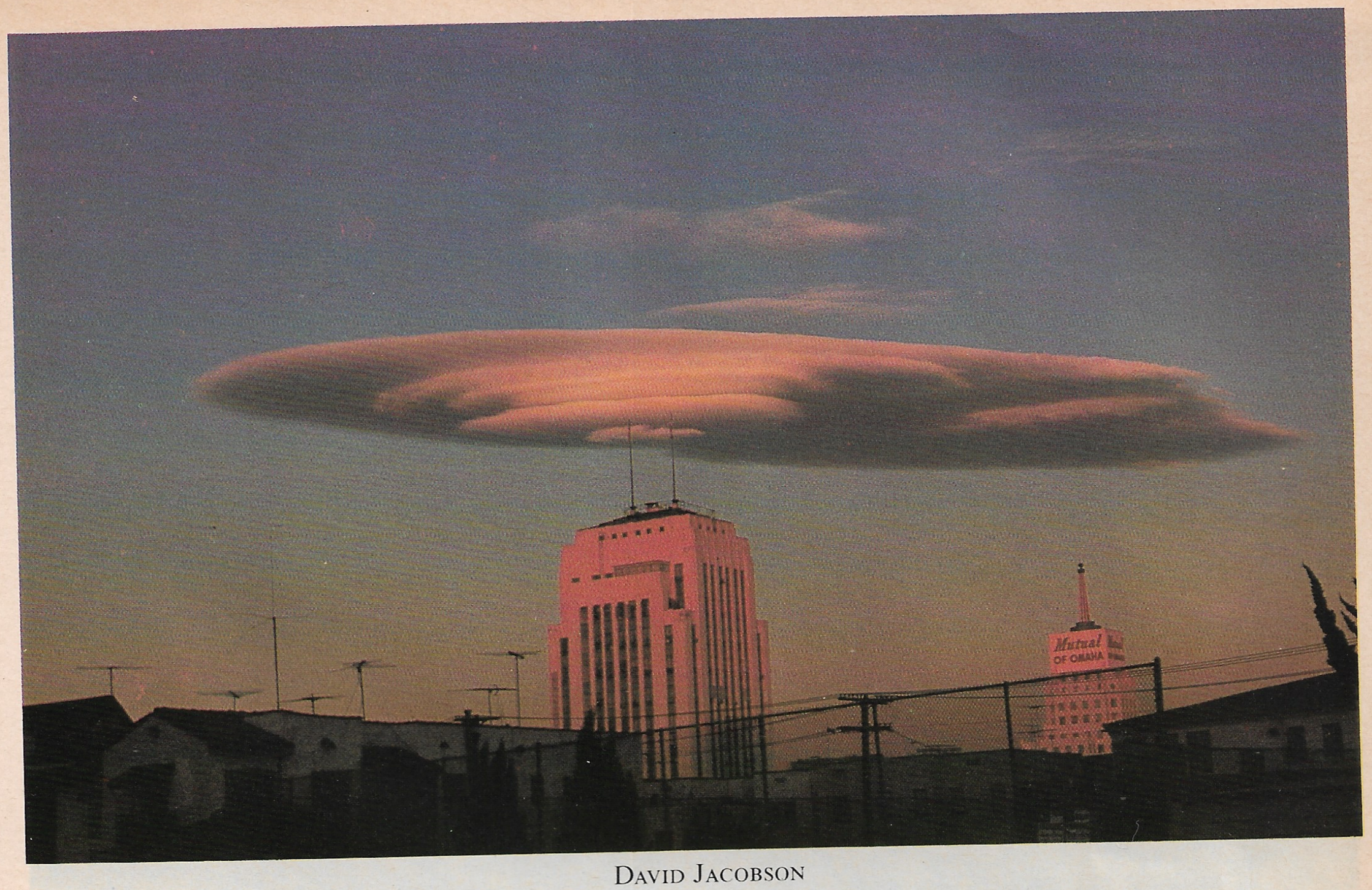
"They might be hearts of lettuce with tripods for feet," says Spielberg, "but so as not to throw the country into a panic, they are posing as My Favorite Martian with the antennae and the one-piece jumpsuits."

"Somebody out there really has the mind of a master," concludes Vallee. "A truly deep sense of humor."

It's a cosmic Ping-Pong match, a mental star war; no flight of fancy is too weird to be explored. In that spirit, I ask a question that's been haunting me since Acapulco. "Are UFO appearances random, or do you suppose they select their 'victims'?" I hope nobody in the restaurant has overheard that. Spielberg wants to believe they're random, "so everyone will have a chance"; especially him, I suspect. He's aching for a close encounter of *any* kind. Vallee responds with just what I had dearly hoped: "I would guess that they're not random, because there are just too many sightings where a guy is driving along the road at night and lo and behold there's a UFO right in front of him and little occupants are standing there, waiting. . . .It just seems like the whole thing is set up for that person to see."

So the other night I was driving down Interstate 5 from San Francisco, through the San Joaquin Valley where it's barren and deserted, and I looked up at that endless expanse of starry sky and saw these flashing red lights traveling toward me, very slowly, right toward my car, and my heart jumped, and I thought, "Jesus, they *know* I'm doing this piece, and what a *fabulous* smash ending, even though a few readers might be somewhat skeptical."

It was a 747. ■



DAVID JACOBSON

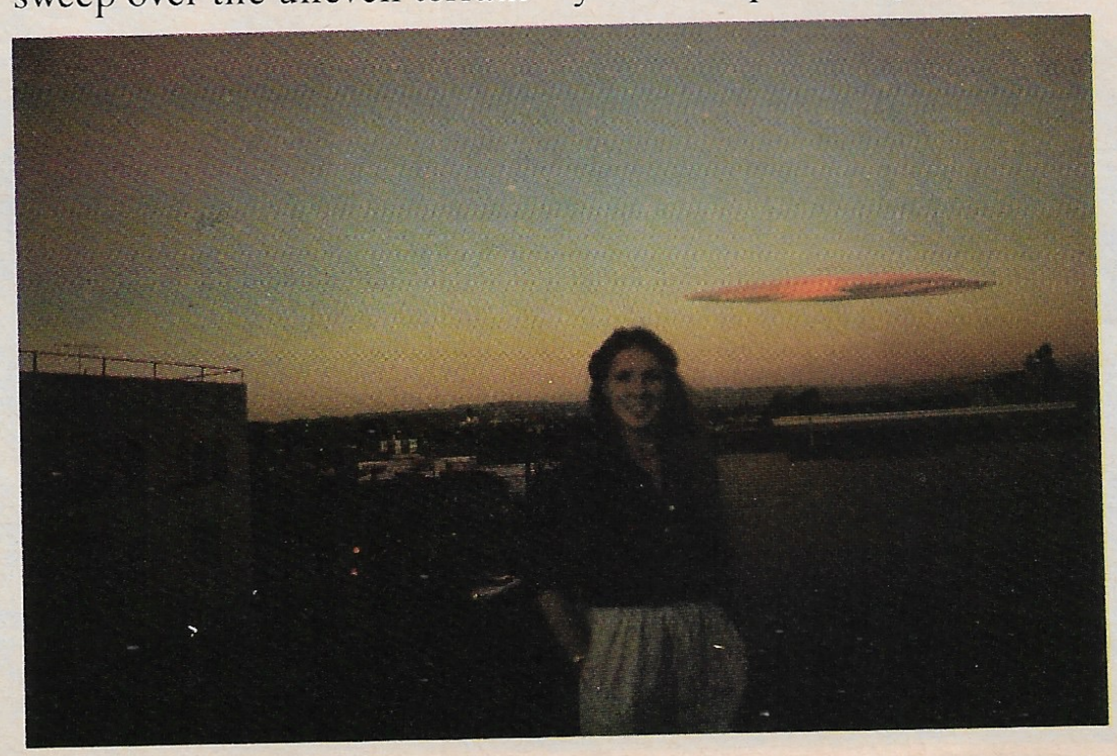
Cloud Encounters: 11/16/76

"... In a curious blend of anxiety and anticipation, thousands of people took to the streets and rooftops to gaze at the unearthly spectacle ..."

The first sighting was reported just before dusk—an elongated, lens-shaped form cruised across the Santa Monica Mountains and hovered in an otherwise clear sky over the Los Angeles basin.

As the setting sun painted the object in pastel shades of pink and purple, the telephones began to ring at Griffith Park Observatory and in weather stations throughout Southern California. Thousands of people took to the streets and rooftops to gaze at the unearthly spectacle. Dozens of observers—including the six whose photographs are shown here and on the following pages—sought to capture the eerie vision on film.

The sense of mystery was later dispelled by the meteorologists, who pinned a scientific label and a dispassionate explanation on the phenomenon. What we saw was merely an "alto-cumulus lenticular," a rare but easily explained cloud that appears when high-velocity winds sweep over the uneven terrain of a mountain range. The hot Santa Ana wind had carried moist air across the Santa Monica Mountains, where a dense cloud was formed, then sculpted into its startling shape by the peaks and canyons, and painted pink by the magnificent sunset.



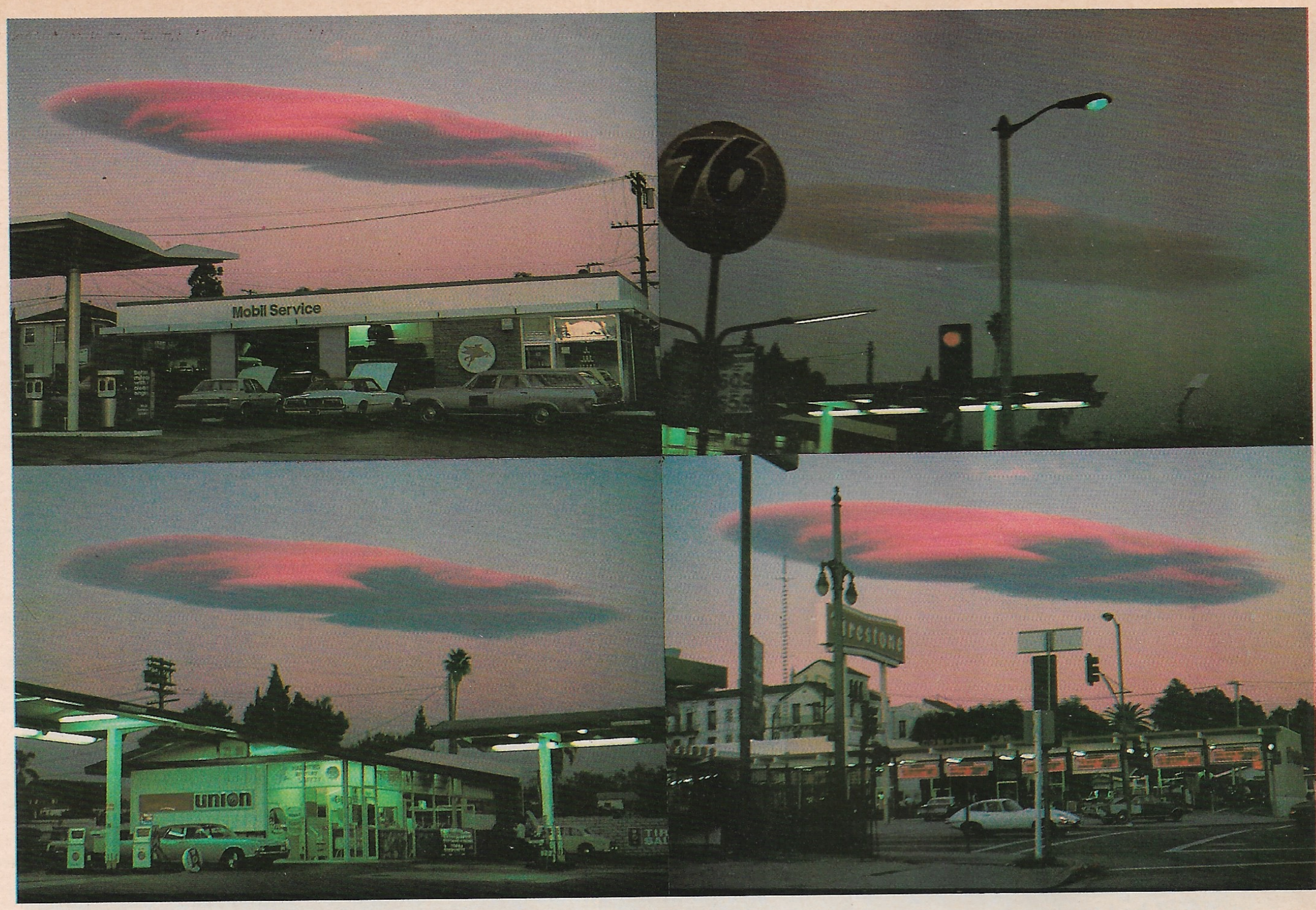
DAVID GREENBERG

But the weathermen said nothing about the peculiar emotional climate on that day—a curious blend of anxiety and anticipation among those who looked skyward and saw the cloud. Like the near-mythic movie scene of a UFO landing, the unidentified object worked a strange magic on the bewildered and bedazzled earthlings. For a moment, we experienced both a sense of déjà vu—and a glimpse at a possible future.

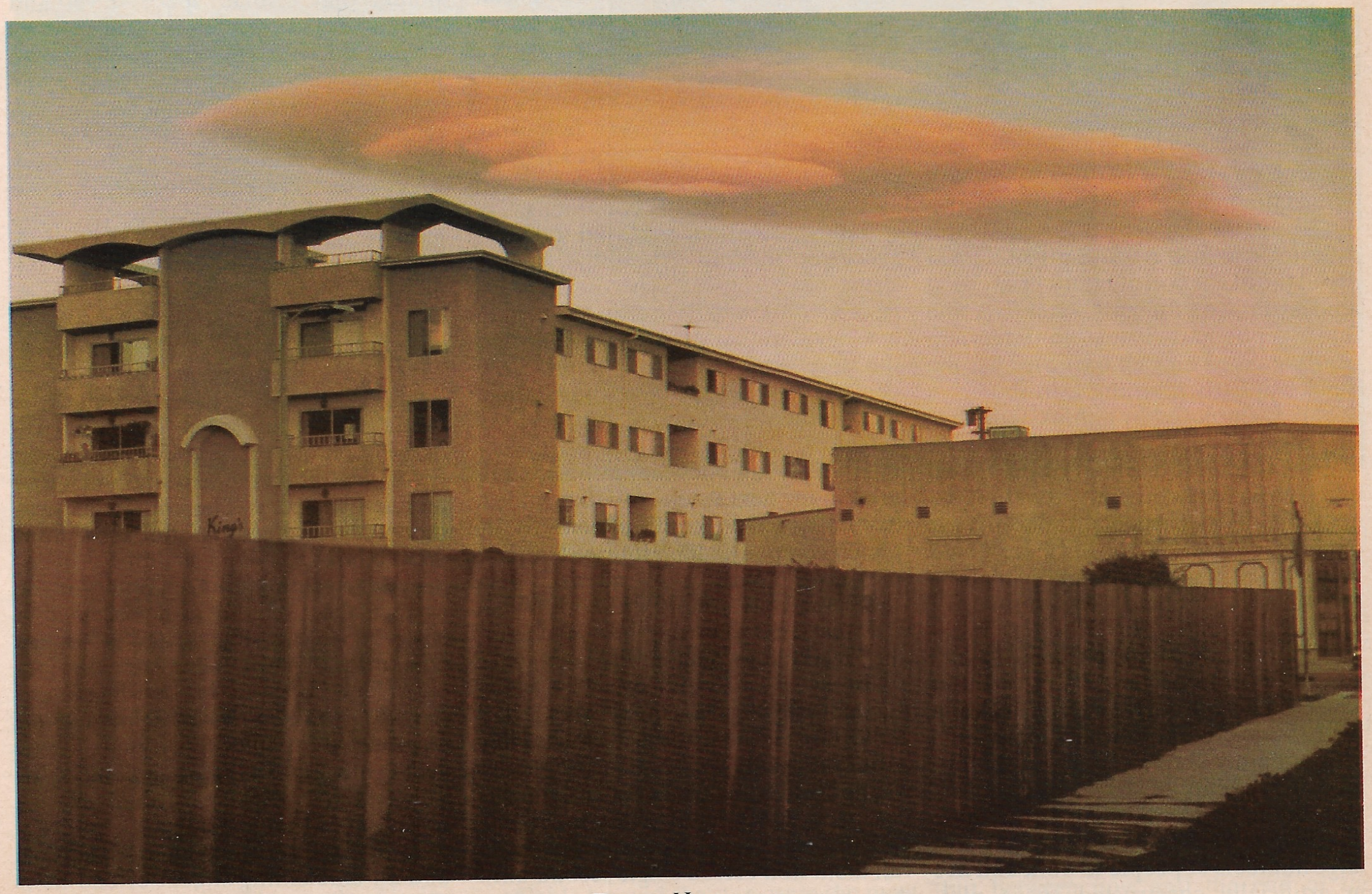
"Something spiritual happened when we saw the cloud," recalls David Greenberg of Environmental Communications, whose photograph is shown on this page. "The way the cloud was shaped, the way it hovered in the sky, the way it seemed to bring on warm winds—it was more than a cloud. It was mind-blowing." **—Jonathan Kirsch**

RAUL VEGA

ROGER WEBSTER



PAUL RUSCHA



DAVID HOCKNEY